

# The Time of Man, the “Place” of Godman

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In modern times we are confronted with a problem that has plagued man for several years. The existential crisis seems to be constantly growing. While reflecting on this crisis, man is forced to look for ways out, which of course turn out to be dead ends. The most typical of these is the creation of an ideal life, replacing his authentic and unique one. Suffering and death remind man of the brevity of his presence in the present (or in the future); thus, he negotiates an alternative solution not with himself and with God but with his ideal persona, in order to remain “invincible” in the eternity of the fallen world.

This alternative is the so-called *meta-universe* – man’s ideal creation in order for him to replace the genuine reality and the original Paradise. The concept of the meta-universe it’s not arbitrary; it is a consequence of the post-time – that is, man’s attempt to transform the present time into a duration of course and life, where neither the actual person (nor, of course, God) exist, but only the self-deification of his ideal image<sup>1</sup>. Consequently, man himself abandons himself, God, his fellow man and

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1. Actually, man attempts to appropriate God’s «*Εγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν*», always responding with a resounding “I Am” when asked who he really is. He does not declare his authentic image but an ideal persona, inherent of the demonic imagination, which attempts to selfishly dominate over all persons and beings. That is to say, he questions both the presence of God and the presence of his real image as the image of God. Self-deification is not the emergence of a person, who is and has life to offer, but the all-encompassing march and movement towards chaos, nothingness, and non-being. See Io. Kornarakis, *Ἡ μεταμόρφωση*, Afoi Kyriakidi Publications, Thessaloniki 1982, pp. 19-20.

the present life. He rushes his own image and at the same time rushes himself to prevent death. He abusively uses every possible means to transform his ideal self into an invincible caricature in the face of death. In this way, man is unaware that death has already been defeated<sup>2</sup>. He is, of course, even more unaware of his own self, but also of the depth of his own construction.

Man, trapped in the rush and speed of the modern world, needs something deeper and more substantial than the “technique”. He really needs to immerse himself, to observe and know himself more deeply, to see that he is possessed by a “life-giving” spirit, not a “technical” one. The spirit of man is constructed by the Spirit of God and this fact cannot be broken and radically changed by man himself. He was therefore created to co-rule with his Creator<sup>3</sup>, the King of life, but also to reign in the world. The point is to realize from whom and not simply from where he has already received the perpetual power and inspiration of creation and technique. He is called, as an image «ἀπαράλλακτος τοῦ ὄντος»<sup>4</sup>, by grace, to turn his ears to the word of the Church<sup>5</sup>; not, however, to that word which he thinks as being the epicenter of the Church, that is, the human discourse, but to that which proceeds from the Holy Spirit.

Man, before rushing to make ideas disappear on the ideational level, is invited to take into account what St. Gregory of Nyssa characteristically mentions: «καθάπερ γὰρ ἐν τῷ βίῳ τούτῳ καταλλήλως τῇ χρείᾳ σχηματίζεται παρὰ τῶν τεχνιτευόντων τὸ ὄργανον, οὕτως οἷόν τι σκεῦος εἰς βασιλείας ἐνέργειαν ἐπιτήδειον τὴν ἡμετέραν φύσιν ὁ ἀριστοτέχνης ἐδημιούργησε»<sup>6</sup>. The first Craftsman of life, the Beginningless, gave to

2. «Ἦλθεν ἡ τῆς ζωῆς βασιλεία καὶ κατελύθη τοῦ θανάτου τὸ κράτος καὶ γέγονεν ἄλλη γέννησις, βίος ἕτερος, ἄλλο ζωῆς εἶδος, αὐτῆς τῆς φύσεως ἡμῶν μεταστοιχείωσις», Ἁγίου Gregory of Nyssa, PG 46, 604C.

3. «Ὁ Θεὸς θέλησε νὰ γίνονται ἔτσι τὰ πράγματα, ὥστε αὐτὸς νὰ εἶναι δημιουργός, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος συνδημιουργός»; see fr. Symeon Krayiopoulos, *Γονεῖς καὶ παιδιὰ*, To Perivoli tis Panagias Publications, Thessaloniki 2018, p. 18.

4. Cf. *Μηναῖον Ἀγούστου*, 6η, θ' ὡδὴ τοῦ Κανόνας.

5. To act by hearing, like the infant who by hearing seeks his mother's voice when she calls him to her. The Church is the mother of man; she is the bird who puts her nestlings under her wings. She does not extort them; she nourishes, protects, and reforms them; cf. *Matthew* 23, 37.

6. Gregory of Nyssa, *Περὶ κατασκευῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*, ΕΠΕ, vol. 5, Paterikai Ekdoseis

man’s nature this content, which is the only and most suitable for the practice and the formation of His kingdom in the world. Nothing in him, both in his body and in his soul, is formed for anything less than the kingdom<sup>7</sup> and the path to deification. Any contrary course, which tends to end in chaos, is not inherent in him, but is a falsification and denial of his authentic “Being”.

Every element in the human soul is –by grace and not by substance– a copy of the original Craftsman; a copy –as St. Gregory explains– that it fits and belongs only to the King<sup>8</sup>. Thus man, as king of the world, is able to manage, cultivate and increase the beauty the latter’s beauty, according to the measure of the power of his spirit, which is has been created by Divine grace. He should stop treating the world as a field for experimentation of his distorted thought of creativity and see it for what it was from the beginning – a sacred reality, where its order, harmony and beauty make him filled with wonder and holy awe<sup>9</sup>. This admiration enables man to create in the world those preconditions which will not increase the intensity of his existential crisis by trying to eliminate pain and death, but which will make him act, even on a technological level, according to “all of them may be one” («ἵνα πάντες ἐν ὧσι») <sup>10</sup>.

Therefore, in this sacred reality –the world as God’s gift to man–, time is for man’s benefit and not against him. Because the events of suffering and death frighten man, who –in his imagination– believes that he will not be able to live to taste the ideal cradle of life, attempts to do anything at his disposal to find himself in the so-called post-time –the escape from the personal present and the integration into the “place” of pleasure<sup>11</sup>– at

“Gregorios Palamas”, Thessaloniki 1987, p. 36.

7. «Καὶ ἔτι πρὸς τούτοις, τὸ τῆς δυναστευούσης τῶν πάντων φύσεως εἰκόνα γενέσθαι, οὐδὲν ἕτερόν ἐστιν, ἢ εὐθὺς βασιλίδα δημιουργηθῆναι τὴν φύσιν», *op.cit.*, p. 38.

8. *Op.cit.*, pp. 36-38.

9. Cf. D. Koutroubis, *Ἡ χάρις τῆς Θεολογίας*, Domos Publications, Athens 2018, p. 288.

10. *John* 17, 21.

11. The worldly pleasures are man’s choice to move away from the suffering of the Cross. By being in the state of ontological suffering and asking for help, man knows that he will receive an answer from the One who incarnated Himself and wore the garment of suffering to give man the throne of true pleasure – his deification next to God. Instead of that, though, man chooses the pleasures that satisfy the restraint of the leathery robe that leads to death; see Maximus the Confessor, *Κεφάλαια διάφορα Θεολογικά*, Β’

that point where his only concern will be the individual survival and the immortality of his ideal persona or his “artificial icon”. The present time constantly reminds him of his smallness and the finiteness of his physical presence<sup>12</sup>.

According to the timeless Patristic word, man deserves, for his own sake and for the sake of the love poured out in his person, to reconsider everything in himself. He ought to know from the beginning the true content of his own existence and of time. The Church’s discourse, which is neither heard nor is perceived “in secular time” within the established moments from sunrise to sunset, is very specific with regard to the time’s real meaning; “time is the ‘place’ of our meeting with the Creator; time is the process of the realization of God’s plan for the creation”, since “creation has not yet been completed”<sup>13</sup>. Each man is given a special time, short but sufficient for the achievement of his salvation<sup>14</sup>; –that is, for the constant loving relationship between him, God and the other people, so that man may be led to his ultimate goal, which is theosis.

The present time constitutes the occasion for man to offer his precious presence in God’s eternal plan, the ages of ages creation<sup>15</sup>. From the moment of his birth, he has been called by God as His co-craftsman in this world. From the very first day he begins molding the formation and enrichment of his image as the image of his Creator and Craftsman. He works on behalf of himself so that, as a life-giving image, he can relate and rejoice unceasingly with God’s other life-giving images, his fellow human beings. In this way, which he discovers and learns practically and empirically, he participates daily in God’s way of being; he participates in the communion of the Holy Trinity<sup>16</sup>.

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ἐκατοντάς, λδ’, PG 90, 1233.

12. See G. Mantzaridis, *Χριστιανική ἠθική II*, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 2010, pp. 538-539.

13. Elder Sophrony (Sakharov) of Essex, *Περὶ Προσευχῆς*, Holy Monastery of St. John the Baptist, Essex, England 2017, p. 25.

14. *Op.cit.*, pp. 25-26.

15. “Besides, by being incorporated in the body of Christ, the believer invests in Him the time of his life”, G. Mantzaridis, *op.cit.*, p. 537.

16. “The loving God has honored His lover man by donating to him His ‘image’: man’s existence to be an image of God’s existence”, Chr. Yannaras, *Πτώση – Κρίση – Κόλαση*,

If modern man tries to transcend the time of life given to him through technological inventions in order to replace the genuineness of his existence with something ideal and fragilely tangible, he acts likewise not for the joy of being social and for the sake of the life of the world, but for his self-interest: to evade the certainty of his death. It is legitimate to invent things that help humanity to be inspired by the beauty of the world's creativity and the joy that derives from it. Anything else, however, precisely because it predisposes self-interest, does not actually result in indisputable joy, but in the confirmation of the already existing ontological despair due to the fact that the person has not managed to find his personal ultimate meaning. That is to say, however imaginative and spectacular a new technological achievement might seem, it remains essentially the very thing from which it was constructed – the hell of individuality<sup>17</sup>.

An insecure man is indifferent to really know himself; moreover, he attempts to repress his original image by introducing in its place an ideal one, and chasing time. In this way, he becomes enslaved to a particular idea, since his days are never enough for him not to feel desperate. On the contrary, what he really needs is to face reality differently; to face it through God's way of being, through the Church. His decision must be defined through his integration "into the way of life which Christ introduces through the Church and which is revealed in the Holy Eucharist"<sup>18</sup>. There is no other "place" in the modern world where man can truly live freely, as the true image of God. The meaning of creativity, the meaning of the world and time, and the purpose of the life and man's Master Craftsman is revealed within this mystery<sup>19</sup>.

In the Divine Liturgy, the modern yet beleaguered man can discover himself and at the same time face the meaning of the beginning of life,

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Ikaros Publishing, Athens 2017, p. 47.

17. "Something that doesn't feed everyone, something that's not everyone's joy ... it's not even yours. A joy of yours –even the greatest– when it is not joy, nurturing and comfort for all, is for you too, nothing but negativity and rot. If thy joy be divided and thy joy be spent, it is hell", Archim. Vasileios, *Εἰσοδικόν*, Hiera Moni Iviron Publications, Hagion Oros 2003, pp. 109-110.

18. G. Mantzaridis, *op.cit.*, p. 539.

19. "The Liturgy of Altar makes, regulates and constitutes all in all", Archim. Vasileios, *Εἰσοδικόν*, *op.cit.*, p. 99.

as well as the meaning of the temporary end in the present world, which is the beginning of the eternal life<sup>20</sup>. The Divine Liturgy is God-man's "place"; it is His sacrifice, which is celebrated on the Altar and constitutes the heart of man's life and self-consciousness<sup>21</sup>. It is in this "place", which God-man set as the supreme point within the world, that man can encounter the meaning and significance of unending creativity. As eternity opens up in front of him, he can realize that he enters into it in one worldly day, which is impossible to be temporally defined.

There are many people wondering what are the new, modern and essential things that the Church can propose regarding the problem of disorientation due to the technological modernization. Her answer, until the end of the world, will be this new center of hers, namely the Divine Liturgy. If this is suppressed, overtaken or distorted in a human and rational way, then man will have lost everything – his *raison d'être*. A brilliant technological achievement can reveal a power that will make man's life easier and more convenient, but it will always have an expiration date. When this achievement is eroded, man is revealed as what he really is: impotent and weak, being isolated by choice. But the Divine Liturgy is not a secular sequence of time that has a beginning, middle and end, so that man forgets it and tries to replace it by inventing something else in its place. In the secular dialect it is the eternal novelty, which continuously calls man to set a new beginning for himself. This beginning is not understood temporally, but is defined in God's *saeculum*.

If man understands the time of his life as something purely human, then everything is pointless. Every science, art, and technical and artificial means will exist to cover man's perpetual fear and insecurity, that he finds no meaning and there is no meaning for him. If, on the contrary, he takes time and the world for what it really is, a divine-human reality, then he will realize that the only authentic time is the liturgical one, since "it is neither history as time, nor creation as space, nor the logic of fallen man, nor the art of the faltering individual. In the Liturgy everything

20. "Death is our birth into eternal life ... our entrance into eternity is our birthday"; see Archim. Zacharias (Zacharou), *Ὁ κρυπτός τῆς καρδίας ἄνθρωπος*, Holy Monastery of St. John the Baptist, Essex, England 2016, pp. 50-51.

21. Cf. Archim. Vasileios, *op.cit.*, p. 99.

altered in the good alteration; tested (crushed and rectified), crucified and resurrected<sup>22</sup>.

The "technical spirit" that emerges through the previous study of the secular logic, which in turn seeks proof in everything that transcends it, is the one that attempts with each of its own constructs and devices to understand the course of life; to intervene and violate the reason of beings, in order to forever eliminate the already repressed psychic conflict and the despair of pettiness. On the contrary, the "life-giving spirit" obeys and follows the incarnate Word of the Creator of all things, without asking for understanding. Instead, he brings before him the conflict and despair he has experienced, leading them to the Holy Altar, the "place" where the greatest and incomparable event of life, the "supreme love", is manifested<sup>23</sup>. Even if modern man sacrifices himself for the technology's sake, so as to avoid enduring Love and attempt to cover even the sun, it is certain that in the same space and time there will be the "ecumenical man". The latter is, by grace, God-man's "god-man", who will be there to offer himself to the desperate modern man.

This "ecumenical man", who is omnipresent though invisible in this cosmic noise and the whirlpool he creates, is today the God-man's "place". He is the one who knows that he meets with the God-man at every single moment<sup>24</sup>. We dare to put forth this argument, because this man cultivates and fulfils, by God, his authentic image; that is, he is being prepared for eternity<sup>25</sup>. Besides, man in his person prepared by God contains eternity, since, as St. John Damascene characteristically says, «αἰὼν γὰρ λέγεται καὶ ἡ ἐκάστου τῶν ἀνθρώπων ζωὴ»<sup>26</sup>. The life of man is eternal because

22. *Op.cit.*, p. 97.

23. "Total love, therefore, is all-consuming; it contains all truth, all righteousness, and all that is sublime, noble, immortal, blessed, divine"; see Justin Popović, *Ἄνθρωπος καὶ Θεάνθρωπος*, transl. fr. Zoran Jevtić, Astir Publications, Athens 1969, p. 17.

24. In this man, God-man finds refuge when the cold-hearted leave him alienated and abandoned outside their space. Thus He, who is the One who rests along with the saints, finds His habitation, His dwelling place, His paradise, His joy and His hole in the heart of the ecumenical man; see Archim. Aimilianos Simonopetritis, *Ζωὴ ἐν Πνεύματι*, Indiktos Publications, Athens 2020, p. 326.

25. Archim. Justin Popović, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

26. John Damascene, *Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως*, transl. N. Matsoukas,

he is the image that “has been born” by Him who is the one and only eternal, the immeasurable God<sup>27</sup>.

Therefore, the important thing for the modern man is not to abandon his creativity even when he uses technology, but not to replace his authentic life with a life filled with the pain of his impending death. The Church’s Eucharistic and liturgical word does not prevent him, nor does it deny him to take nature and matter into his hands, either to process or to exploit them, enhancing the improvement of his daily life. It does, however, help him to act in one direction for the sake of the life of the world, aiming to reach at the end of each day the «ἵνα πάντες ἐν ᾧσι»<sup>28</sup>. Man has been called from the beginning of the world to listen to the Liturgical Word, to find that even the present time, revealed in its true meaning through the God-Man, brings out not an endless mundane hell or limitations of the person’s actions, but all his rational qualities. For even he himself was created by the Word, and for this reason he is the entrance into the Divine Word’s eternity<sup>29</sup>. Man, this perfect being (perfect according to the God’s

P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki <sup>6</sup>2009, p. 96.

27. «Εἷς αἰὼν ἔστι, καθὼ καὶ λέγεται ὁ Θεὸς αἰώνιος, ἀλλὰ καὶ προαιώνιος. Καὶ αὐτὸν γὰρ τὸν αἰῶνα αὐτὸς ἐποίησε; μόνος γὰρ ἀναρχος ὢν ὁ Θεὸς πάντων αὐτὸς ἔστι ποιητής, τῶν τε αἰώνων καὶ πάντων τῶν ὄντων. Θεὸν δὲ εἰπὼν δηλόν, ὅτι τὸν Πατέρα λέγω καὶ τὸν μονογενῆ αὐτοῦ Υἱόν, τὸν Κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ τὸ Πανάγιον, τὸν ἕνα Θεὸν ἡμῶν»; *op.cit.*, pp. 96-98.

28. Technological development should not constitute an arbitrary and autonomous development, as if it were to be proclaimed to a god; like every derivative of man’s inherent creativity, technology must serve man, as each individual human being offers himself for the sake of the other and the Other to live. If technology does not exist for the sake of giving and living in the world, then it is something that intensifies hell. It must be perceived as the instrument through which man humbles himself and offers, as a sacrifice, his intelligence so that his neighbor may rest and be at peace, always in the process of moving from the image to likeness. The creative genius is a matter of life, not survival, and the following timeless verses constantly reminds this to us: “Next to you, this cripple before he sleeps takes off his leg, / leaves it in the corner –a hollow wooden leg– / you must fill it like you fill the pot with earth to plant flowers, / like the darkness fills with stars, / like poverty is filled little by little with thought and love”, Y. Ritsos, *Καπνισμένο τσουκάλι*, Kedros Publications, Athens 1974, p. 8.

29. There is not a single person who has not been the outcome of the Divine providence, to come and live in the world. Even in the extreme case of a rape, the person who is born, without human intention, is unique to God. Every man must always have the feeling that he is God’s vocation, which he is called to follow, and God is his own vocation, because he is “the place of God’s communion”; see Archim. Aimilianos

perfect and selfless love, which He infused into the person of this being), exists for a specific purpose: to enter the present time of his life with intention and responsibility for himself and others, as well as to decide at the same moment to enter the eternity's antechamber<sup>30</sup>.

By functioning in this way, man discovers the technical (and not artificial) greatness of his "life-giving spirit". He repositions himself within his relationship with his Archetype (the Master Craftsman) and reveals this small being as the whole (the "ecumenical") within the universe. Thus, in the person of man, as born again and "re-baptized" from the God-Man, the ontological truth is revealed. In other words, by separating himself from the Holy Trinity, and especially its second person, the God-Man, man separates his existence from creation and thus remains "uprooted" and chaotic; he remains eternally incomplete, irrespective of how perfect and inaccessible as his every technological achievement might seem.

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Simonopetritis, *op.cit.*, p. 316.

30. Cf. Archim. Justin Popović, *op.cit.*, pp. 18-19.